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Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01
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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PFOR TS LY
SUBJECT: FOREIGN MINISTER CHATTY CALLS RELATIONS
WITH LIBYA "DIALOGUE OF THE DEAF"

1. DURING DECEMBER 17 DISCUSSION OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS IN
NATIONAL ASSEMBLY BUDGET DEBATES, FOREIGN MINISTER HABIB
CHATTY DEALT WITH RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN TUNISIAN-LIBYAN
BILATERAL RELATIONS. HE SAID THAT BILATERAL RELATIONS
HAVE "SEEN CRISIS AND WORSENING" ("WA TAAZAMAT" AND "TA DAHWRAT")
ESSENTIALLY OVER THE PROBLEM OF THE CONTINENTAL SHELF.
RECALLING THE AGREEMENT SIGNED BY LARG MINISTER FOR RCC
AFFAIRS TAHAR CHERIF BEN AMEU AND GOT INTERIOR MINISTER
TAHAR BELKHODJA IN AUGUST TO SUBMIT THE DISPUTE TO THE ICJ
FOR ARBITRATION, CHATTY SAID TWO MEETINGS WERE HELD TO
PREPARE A COMMON TEXT FOR THE ICJ. LIBYA, HE SAID, WENT
AGAINST THE TERMS OF THE AUGUST AGREEMENT BY INSISTING THAT
THE ICJ BE ASKED ONLY TO TELL TUNISIA AND LIBYA WHAT RELEVANT
INTERNATIONAL LAWS SHOULD BE APPLIED INLSUBSEQUENT BILATERAL
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DISCUSSIONS TO DELINEATE THE SHELF. TUNISIA INSISTED THAT
ICJ BE ASKED TO FIX BOUNDARIES IN BINDING ARBI-
TRATION DECISION. THESE TWO MEETINGS BECAME, CHATTY TOLD
NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, A "DIALOGUE OF THE DEAF."

2. CHATTY NOTED THAT A THIRD TECHNICAL MEETING HAD PREVIOUSLY

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BEEN PLANNED TO TAKE PLACE IN DECEMBER. TUNISIA SEES NO USE
IN HOLDING THIS MEETING SINCE IT IS CLEAR THAT THE PROBLEM
IS POLITICAL AND REQUIRES A POLITICAL DECISION BY THE TWO
GOVERNMENTS ON AGREED TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR ICJ ROLE. HE NOTED
THAT LIBYA HAS ACCEPTED "IN PRINCIPLE" THE CONVENING OF
SUCH A POLITICAL LEVEL MEETING, BUT THAT NO DATE HAS BEEN FIXED.
HE EMPHASIZED THAT PRINCIPLE OF AUGUST AGREEMENT SHOULD BE UPHELD
AND THAT ICJ SHOULD BE ASKED BY TWO COUNTRIES TO ARBITRATE
DISPUTE.

3. IN OTHER ISSUES CONCERNING TUNISIAN-LIBYAN RELATIONS,
CHATTY SAID THAT NO SOLUTION HAS BEEN FOUND TO PROBLEM OF
TUNISIAN CITIZENS HELD IN LIBYA. HE SAID GOT DEMANDS
RELEASE OF ALL TUNISIANS HELD IN LIBYA, INCLUDING SOLDIERS
HELD AS "HOSTAGES" AND BUSINESSMAN RAOUF M'HENNI, IN RETURN
FOR LIBYANS ARRESTED IN TUNISIA FOR ATTEMPTED SABOTAGE.
THE FATE OF SOLDIERS CONCERNS US, HE SAID, BUT WE DEMAND PRIOR
RELEASE OF CIVILIANS ESPECIALLY THOSE UNDER THE PROTECTION OF
LIBYAN AUTHORITIES AND AT THEIR SERVICE.

4. COMMENT: WHILE THE GOT HARBORED FEW ILLUSIONS THAT THE
AUGUST AGREEMENT ON ICJ ARBITRATION OF CONTINENTAL SHELF
DISPUTE WOULD PRODUCE QUICK RESULTS, CHATTY'S STATEMENTS
INDICATE GROWING GOT IRRITATION AT LARG STALLING TACTICS.
WHATEVER INFLUENCED LARG TO AGREE TO ICJ ARBITRATION IN
AUGUST, THAT INFLUENCE APPEARS TO HAVE HAD A SHORT LIFE.
CHATTY'S STATEMENT TO THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY GAVE IMPRESSION
THAT CONTINENTAL SHELF DISPUTE WAS THE "ESSENTIAL" PROBLEM
BETWEEN TUNISIA AND LIBYA. WHILE GOT'S URGENT DESIRE TO GET
AT OFFSHORE PETROLEUM RESOURCES IN THE DISPUTED AREA HAVE
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MADE THE ISSUE "ESSENTIAL"TO TUNISIA, DEEPER DIVISIONS
BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES DATING TO THE ABORTED JERBA UNITY
DECLARATION, AS WELL AS UNDERLYING PHILOSOPHIC DIFFERENCES,
APPEAR TO BE CAUSE OF "CRISIS AND WORSENING." CONTINENTAL
SHELF QUESTION AND TUNISIAN HOSTAGES IN LIBYA APPEAR TO BE
MANIFESTATIONS OF THESE IDEOLOGICAL DIVISIONS AND CHATTY
HAS CORRECTLY ASSUMED THAT RENEWED "POLITICAL" COMMITMENT
WILL BE NECESSARY BEFORE PROGRESS CAN BE MADE IN BILATERAL
RELATIONS AT THE "TECHNICAL" LEVEL. CHATTY'S STATEMENT
THAT GOT IS OFFERING LIBYAN COMMANDOS IN EXCHANGE FOR
TUNISIAN HOSTAGES IS A NEW ELEMENT, AS IT IS FIRST PUBLIC
SUGGESTION THAT "TRADE" TO RESOLVE THIS INCREASING IRRITANT
IS POSSIBLE.
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